

Earlier this month I had the pleasure of sitting down with Corporal John James Beadle and listening to a retelling of his journey through military and civilian life. Corporal Beadle is a man with a storied past full of bravery and kindness which deserves to be shared with the entire world. His journey began back in 1968 at the height of the Vietnam War. With him having just graduated from South Shore Vocational High School the year prior. Beadle, knowing he would be drafted soon, decided to skip the wait, and enlisted on his own.

By 1969 Beadle was in New Jersey at Fort Dix attending the Army's eight weeklong boot camp, after which he volunteered for Airborne service, since it paid better. Beadle would attend jump school at Fort Benning and artillery training at Fort Sill where he would remain until 1970 until he was finally shipped to Vietnam. After Landing in Cam Rahn Bay, Beadle made his way over to Camp Evans where he underwent a one-week course known as Search Training, which prepared soldiers for Jungle Warfare. Once he was finished with this training, he was sent to Forward Support Battery (FSB) Ripcord, a base in the mountainous regions of the country, to fulfill his role as an artilleryman. While still undergoing training at Camp Evans, Beadle remembers seeing illumination flares being shot into the sky from deep in the jungle. On June 5th, he found out where those flares came from and why he saw them so frequently as he began his stay at Ripcord.

Ripcord had no roads leading in or out and Beadle described his flight in saying, "It was about a forty-five-minute flight from Eagle to Ripcord, and I was looking out on the countryside seeing what it's like. I started seeing things that looked like potholes, those were craters". Upon arrival everyone in the helicopter was instructed to dismount by jumping to the ground while it still hovered several feet in the air. Adjusting to life on base was difficult, even shocking at times. The Commanding Officer of the entirety of FSB Ripcord, former Buffalo Bills Starting Guard, Lieutenant Bob Kalsu, was killed only three weeks after Beadle first met him. Furthermore, all the soldiers on Ripcord were unkempt and exhausted, "mountain men" as Beadle described them. It would not be long, before he too became one. Despite the difficulty of living in a warzone, Beadle had no trouble performing the job he was sent there to do. He was assigned to the 2nd of the 11th Field Artillery on base, where he would provide mountain top artillery support to the infantrymen in the jungle below. Calls for support were near constant, "We were firing missions left and right. You'd get through one mission, and you'd get another one. The Infantry in the area around Ripcord were getting clobbered and they needed support".

From July 1st to the 23rd the Battle of FSB Ripcord was fought and attacks from the enemy were near constant as they had found an advantageous firing position near the base. Corporal Beadle had several stories to tell about enemy attacks. Such as when he recounted how, on July 17th an enemy rocket struck a helicopter delivering ammunition to Ripcord causing it to crash. All the members of Beadle's gun crew rushed to put out the flames and rescue who they could, succeeding in saving everyone except for the crashed helicopter's Crew Chief. Beadle would go on to earn a bronze star for his bravery in the rescue. Corporal Beadle also retold the heartbreaking loss of a friend he had on base whom he called, JJ. After finishing a firing mission, the 2nd and 4th gun teams returned to a

bunker awaiting their next job. Beadle was supposed to be the last one to enter the bunker, as the Radio Telephone Operator (RTO), it was his job to wait on the radio by the door for the teams next firing mission. Moments before entering the bunker, a rocket struck killing several soldiers inside including JJ. "I was in awe, as I was standing there talking to him and then all of sudden, he's gone...but during those times you don't have time to think about it, you really don't". Beadle's final day on Ripcord was July 22nd when he medevacked off the base following a direct rocket hit to his bunker. Beadle suffered several wounds during the attack including a piece of shrapnel in his eye, which luckily missed every important part of it and remains lodged there to this day. Soon after his removal from Ripcord, Beadle would be shipped back home with two Purple Hearts, two Bronze Stars, two Army Commendation Medal, and an honorable discharge in 1971.

Despite leaving the Armed Forces, Corporal Beadle's story was very far from over. While his acts in Vietnam portray his courage, his actions upon arriving home, paint his true character. For several years, Beadle bounced between jobs such as a ship wright, hotel manager, engineer, and even a flag store owner. He enjoyed doing all of these, but none of them seemed to be his true calling. He wouldn't find that until 1997 when he was reintroduced to a friend whom he'd served with at Fort Campbell. After rekindling their friendship, Beadle was convinced to join the DAV (Disabled American Veterans). This decision would snowball into a two-decade long career of service to his fellow Veterans. After some coaxing from his friend, Beadle ran for the position of Commander of the local chapter. After being elected, Beadle held the position of Commander for several years before being nominated for a position in the State Department of the DAV. After that it was only a matter of time before Beadle rose through the ranks to become State Commander of the Rhode Island DAV, a distinction he would hold for two years. Reflecting on the deeds he'd done up to that point and the people he'd helped, Beadle said, "I got involved more with helping veterans, and for the last twenty-two years, that's what I've been doing. I've enjoyed every minute of it. It's fun, it's a lot of work, but if you enjoy doing it and it's fun, the work really doesn't matter...I guess my true calling through all of it was to help other people." As Commander, Beadle traveled the United States helping Veterans however he could and during that period, he got involved in many other organizations. Corporal John James Beadle is part of the DAV, The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars Organization, The United States Veterans Vietnam era (USVVE), The Top 3 Retired Military Association, and the 101st Airborne Vietnam Veterans Organization. Beadle also works with adaptive sports organizations to help disabled Veterans return some normalcy to their lives.

To conclude our interview, I asked Mr. Beadle what he would tell to a highschooler looking to join the Armed Forces, and his answer was quite well put, "There's so much available in the six branches now and they all have excellent choices in school and training. Know what you want to do and look at what you'll be able to take out it once you return to the civilian world." Mr. Beadle also wanted to make sure that servicemen past and present, knew that no matter how they served, they're still Veterans. "If a person, male or female, signs up, goes in, whether they do one tour, two tours, three tours, or a lifetime, they're a veteran...it's this country's responsibility to take care of the Veterans, no matter where they served...and as long as I'm breathing, that's what I'm going to do."

